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SUBJECT: BJP: ENTER HINDUTVA HAWKS?

REF: A. NEW DELHI 1747
[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 1329
[1](#)C. NEW DELHI 1278

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: With party revolts, expulsions, leadership intrigue, and name-calling dominating the headlines, the Bharatiya Janta Party(BJP) is in serious trouble and appears rudderless. The conclusion of the three-day long "introspection" meeting by the top party brass exacerbated the public feuds rather than containing them. Speculation is rife that the Hindutva hawks of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) are stepping in to impose discipline on the still-imploding party. END SUMMARY

Seeking The Future In The Past

[1](#)2. (U) The BJP held its much anticipated Chintan Baithak (introspection meeting) in Shimla from August 19 through August 21. Originally billed as a strategy session for the party in the aftermath of the BJP,s defeat in the 2009 general elections, the oft-postponed meeting was restricted to 24 of the BJP,s top leaders, much to the chagrin of senior party leaders omitted from the invite list. Justifying public airing of grievances from BJP leaders, BJP leader Kalraj Mishra told poloff "If leaders are not allowed to speak within the home (within the party), then surely they will speak outside."

Stale Agenda? Blame the Media!

[1](#)3. (SBU) The BJP went into its three-day long meeting with an old agenda and emerged with an old strategy. The BJP's plan for the party,s future differed little from the BJP,s purported strategy from 2004 and 2009 elections - expanding in states where the BJP lacks a traditional role and courting social minorities. One of the 24 leaders attending the meeting told poloff that the three-day long conclave disintegrated into factional feuds with top brass defending their campaign records and efforts with vigor; however, he also accused the media of focusing on the personality conflicts at the meeting rather than the emerging agenda. An editor at a leading Indian daily, D.K. Singh, told poloff that the BJP made no effort to promote an innovative plan to

tackle the BJP's slipping political star in advance of the upcoming elections in Haryana, Maharashtra and Arunachal Pradesh; in fact, the daily press briefings by party spokespersons at BJP headquarters, usually held with regularity, have become sporadic since August 20.

Eternal Bubbling Of The Dissenting Pot

14. (SBU) The focus during and after the conclave centered around the expulsion of former Foreign Minister and senior party leader Jaswant Singh, for his positive portrayal of Pakistan founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah in his book: "Jinnah - India, Partition, Independence." Side-stepping a discussion on the causes of, and response to, the party's trouncing in the 2009 parliamentary elections, the dismissal came on the opening day of the Chintan Baithak (Ref A). Singh's expulsion and ensuing firestorm dominated media attention. Criticizing Singh's expulsion, Arun Shourie, a senior leader of the BJP and a face of the party's intellectual wing referred to BJP president Rajnath Singh as "Alice in Blunderland" and "Humpty Dumpty" in the popular press, sparking more controversy. Emboldened by the open revolts, former Uttarakhand Chief Minister Khanduri questioned his dismissal from office (Ref C) for the 2009 poll debacle when other state leaders have been able to continue in their positions with impunity. Perhaps unhappy that he had been upstaged in the press, Jaswant Singh upped the ante,

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lambasting the BJP as a modern day Klu Klux Klan. A general melee developed as former Foreign Minister Yaswant Sinha and Former National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra took turns sullyng Lok Sabha opposition leader L.K. Advani's reputation, implying that he was involved in the decision to fly Jaswant Singh to Kandahar and release prisoners convicted of terrorism in exchange for hijacked passengers in the New Year's Eve 2000 flight IC 814 crisis - a charge that Advani has consistently refuted since then.

Paging Dr. RSS

15. (SBU) Shourie alluded to the internal rot within the damaged BJP, accusing "some people in the party" in cahoots with "six journalists" of planting negative stories against Advani and others. In light of continued public finger-pointing, Shourie invited the BJP's sister organization, the Hindu nationalist fountainhead, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) to take over the BJP leadership and prepare it for reform by replacing current leadership. This new leadership collective would mimic the leadership structure of the Jan Sangh Parivaar, the Hindutva umbrella organization. Although senior members of the RSS and BJP have publicly criticized the BJP's leadership (Ref A), they have also denied any desire to embroil themselves in the BJP's leadership implosion, asserting the RSS's independent standing from the BJP.

16. (SBU) Despite RSS president Mohan Bhagwat's press conference on August 28 denying any role for the RSS in re-structuring the BJP, a senior RSS leader within the BJP confirmed to us the RSS's intention of replacing BJP leadership. Arguing that a younger set of leaders at the helm of the BJP would stave off the recurring crisis of a single BJP leader's personality destabilizing the organization, he confirmed the RSS's deep involvement and interest in the BJP. The RSS's intimate involvement in the future of the BJP is a foregone conclusion in the Indian media, which is avidly following the visits of RSS leadership to Advani's home, and speculating on the new configurations of the proposed BJP leadership collective.

BJP Waning: Return of the RSS

[17](#). (SBU) COMMENT: Given the leadership bloodletting within BJP ranks and the seemingly arbitrary nature of expulsions within the party, it is clear that the RSS is poised to assert influence within the BJP. However, this intervention is unlikely to halt the BJP free-fall in the upcoming October assembly elections in Maharashtra, Haryana and Arunachal Pradesh. Leaders within the BJP who are critical of RSS control are likely to find themselves sidelined in favor of re-instating party discipline and giving the party a direction for the future. Whether the return of the RSS will mean a return to the hard right Hindutva agenda remains to be seen. Despite the drama, it would be naive to close the book on the BJP; the Congress party underwent similar growing pains in the 1990s and lived to rule another day. END COMMENT
ROEMER